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RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000466

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/09/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: AF/W OFFICE DIRECTOR MEETS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) Summary: AF/W Office Director Philip Carter met with ANPP Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari and AC Presidential candidate Vice President Atiku Abubakar during a visit to Nigeria the week of February 28. The PDP Presidential candidate was unavailable for a meeting despite repeated attempts to schedule him. The two opposition candidates agreed that while elections are unlikely to take place on time, they would continue campaigning as if the scheduled election dates would hold. They diverged over the issue of Atiku's candidacy, with Buhari saying that his indictment would hold and Atiku assuring that the courts would ensure that he gained a spot on the ballot. All in all, both candidates remain concerned about the same issues that Embassy notes: lack of transparency in the nomination and electoral processes, an uneven playing field, President Obasanjo's true intentions and the security situation in the nation. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) AF/W Office Director Philip Carter met with ANPP Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari and AC Presidential candidate Vice President Atiku Abubakar during a visit to Nigeria the week of February 28. The PDP Presidential candidate was unavailable for a meeting despite repeated attempts to schedule him. The two candidates interrupted their campaign activities to meet Carter in Abuja and both were anxious to meet and yet again demonstrated their basic pro-American stances.

BUHARI'S CONCERNS

13. (C) ANPP Candidate Muhammadu Buhari along with his economic adviser Abba Kyari met with Carter to discuss the status of his campaign. Buhari appeared relatively upbeat but maintained his usual reserved demeanor. He had just returned from a rally in Benue state that he classified as "a big success." Kyari told Carter that Buhari was the only "nationalist" candidate citing his dedication to the country and his performance as the head of the Petroleum Trust Fund. They claimed that the campaign was picking up "a lot of support" in the Southwest and the Southeast and that Buhari's votes in the North were not in jeopardy.

14. (C) Buhari stated that he and the party were concerned about the possibility of a delay in the April election dates. He said that INEC had done little preparation and speculated that this was done intentionally to give President Obasanjo an excuse to extend his tenure. Buhari described the President as "upset" over the failure of the National Assembly to amend the Constitution to allow him a third term. In spite of this, Buhari said that he intended to continue campaigning "as if elections were on track." He said that the confusion in the political scene was the direct result of PDP meddling in the affairs of other parties and INEC's unwillingness to conduct free elections. Buhari also reiterated his message that 2007 would not see a three-year election tribunal since "Nigerians will no longer stand for this. They will not wait this time, but will act in the event rigging happens again." He further opined that Atiku should retire from the race quietly since it is obvious that "his indictment precludes his participation."

ATIKU'S CONCERNS

15. (C) Vice President Atiku Abubakar also met with Carter during his visit, but appeared worried and lacked his usual confidence. Accompanied by former PDP Chairman Audu Ogbeh, they echoed Buhari's concerns about the likelihood April elections would hold on time. He blamed President Obasanjo for the problems, stating that it was Obasanjo and Iwu that have "designed the process to fail." "Still, we have no choice but to campaign," he said. Atiku went on to blame his problems on an unknown "personal issue" between him and the President. He said that he has been unable to understand the depth of the President's dislike for him and that he had willingly subsumed his own interests in order to support President Obasanjo. "This was a mistake that I and many others have regretted ever since," he said.

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15. (C) Atiku insisted that INEC would "be forced" to include him on the ballot or that no elections would take place. His demeanor belied his confidence, but he claimed that he was drawing crowds "much larger than the PDP" to his rallies and said that the choice of Umaru Yar'Adua was a "mistake that the PDP has yet to address." Ogbeh pointed to the fact that Yar'Adua is becoming less visible on the campaign trail and that Obasanjo insisted on remaining in front of the campaign process. "Yar'Adua is even absent from many rallies," Atiku said.

COMMENT

16. All in all, both candidates remain concerned about the same issues that Embassy notes: lack of transparency in the nomination and electoral processes, an uneven playing field, President Obasanjo's true intentions and the security situation in the nation. It also goes without saying that both men are political enemies of the President.

CAMPBELL